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ABSTRACT

The project was developed in the fall of 1969 to field test and evaluate prototype social studies units for kindergarten, and grades one, two, and three. The units focused on major concepts drawn from the social sciences, expanding horizontal organization of content, shifting from a basal textbook to a series of supplementary materials, and using an inquiry-oriented approach to knowledge. It was assumed that teacher-developed materials would prove more meaningful for pupils than commercial materials. The major purpose of the project was to see if these units could be effectively used by a sample of North Carolina teachers. They hoped to use the systematic feedback from forty teachers in ten schools and three kindergartens to increase the effectiveness of the units, and to assess the support the teachers might expect to find in most schools with regard to supplementary materials. Two-day conferences served the teacher orientation information gathering functions; three questionnaires were administered on teacher attitudes, current school status, and the effectiveness of conference-type inservice training. After the conference series, the sample units were taught for seven weeks. Next, a final questionnaire was administered to measure school personnel attitudes and teacher assessment of the units, and a summative conference was called. The success of the units, the training, and the project as a whole was borne out. (Author/SBE)

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EVALUATION REPORT

THE CONCEPTUAL SOCIAL STUDIES PROJECT

A Joint Project of the Division

of Social Studies Education and the

Comprehensive School Improvement Project

North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction

November 24, 1970

SP 001 003

Background

In 1965, the social studies staff of the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction began consideration of bringing the social studies curriculum in the North Carolina Public Schools into harmony with what has been called "The New Social Studies." By the fall of 1967, the SDPI staff had developed a rationale and proposed curricular sequence.

The revised curriculum was organized around major concepts drawn from anthropology, geography, sociology, economics, political science and history. This curriculum differed from the "traditional" in: focusing on concepts rather than facts, expanding horizontal organization of content, shifting from a basal textbook to a series of supplementary materials, and in espousing an inquiry-oriented approach to knowledge. This shift was seen as requiring a change in the teacher's role from a dispenser of knowledge to a promoter of the learning process.

The proposed curricular sequence was subjected to the scrutiny of teachers and other local educational personnel by means of meetings and other contacts during 1968. The resulting curriculum was subsequently adopted by the State Board of Education at its May 7, 1970 meeting.

In the summer of 1968 a selected group of teachers under the direction of the state social studies staff produced the first conceptually-oriented prototype social studies units designed to exemplify the new approach. The first unit, OUR STATE, was produced for the fourth grade; the second, OUR NATION, was produced for grade five. The format for these and subsequent units included suggested "understandings," which were the building blocks for the main ideas of the units. It should be clearly understood here that the units as produced are exemplary or sample units and are not intended to cover all the concepts in a year's study of social studies.

The fourth and fifth grade units were mailed to all administrative units in the spring of 1969. From the state viewpoint, implementation and feedback of information regarding these units were less than desirable. It was determined that further units should be field tested and the materials evaluated prior to state-wide dissemination.

In the summer of 1969 another writing team of teachers produced prototype conceptual units for kindergarten and grades one, two, and three. In the fall of 1969, the staff of the Comprehensive School Improvement Project (CSIP) joined forces with the social studies staff for the purpose of developing a project in which these materials could be field tested and evaluated.

Problem

The major purpose of the pilot social studies project was to provide an answer to the fundamental question, "Can the K-3 social studies units with a conceptual approach be used effectively by a sample of North Carolina teachers at these respective grade levels?". The project was also concerned with how the units could be made more effective, i.e., by obtaining systematic feedback from practicing teachers. Finally, the project was intended to assess the support, in terms of supplementary printed materials, audiovisual materials, etc., that teachers might expect to find in most schools.

The approach which was used expedited an evaluation of the materials without the necessity of control groups. The comparative approach was not considered feasible due to time and money restraints. It also would have necessitated a status study in order to determine "the traditional" social studies program.

The suggested approach to teaching and learning in these prototype units complicated assessment of cognitive student learning. Teachers were encouraged to add or to eliminate portions of the suggested materials, the only constraint being that the learning should build up to the major concepts (understandings). Thus the evaluation relied heavily on responses from the teachers who actually taught the units. All schools, however, were visited at least once by members of the state staff. Samples of student work were obtained and students were questioned by their visitors.

One assumption underlying the conceptual approach is that the teacher is the person best qualified to provide meaningful direction for student learning. Theoretically, teacher-developed materials should prove more meaningful for pupils than commercial materials. The prototype units were seen, not as an end, but as a beginning for the new approach. From the planning stage, the project was seen as serving a teacher-orientation function as well as a materials and process evaluation.

Procedure

In November, 1969, ten schools and three kindergartens were tentatively selected to participate in the social studies project. The primary criterion for this selection was geographical representation of North Carolina schools. Insofar as possible, CSIP schools were chosen. The selection was finally made with consideration to factors such as: rural-urban representation, school size and racial composition of school population. Since all invited schools agreed to participate, it was not necessary to contact alternate selections.

During January and February, two-day orientation conferences for participating teachers were held at Greensboro, Sanford and Williamston. The Wilkesboro conference was delayed due to weather conditions and eventually was limited to one day. Topics covered during these conferences included: behavioral objectives, exercises in the inquiry approach to teaching, planning units of work, the role of the teacher in implementing conceptual learning, an introduction to the prototype units, and an introduction to available supplementary materials. Teachers were repeatedly assured that they were expected to modify the units as they taught.

The conferences also served an information-gathering function. All participants were requested to respond to three questionnaires, the first two of which were concerned with teacher attitudes and current school status in social studies. The third questionnaire was administered in order to gain some measure of the effectiveness of the conference-type training.

Eighty of the eighty-five registered attendants responded to these instruments. Approximately forty who were selected to actually teach the units were included in this group. The rest were principals, supervisors and "visiting" teachers. Teachers who voluntarily taught the units were not included in further evaluation procedures.

At the conclusion of the conference, the schools were urged to begin using the materials as soon as possible without disrupting current class work. All were able to begin within twenty days of the conferences.

The suggested time allotted for teaching the sample units was somewhat arbitrarily determined as seven weeks. For evaluation purposes, the teaching portion of the project was considered terminated with the mailing of a final questionnaire to involved teachers, principals, and supervisors on April 15, 1970.

Procedure (continued)

Responses to the final questionnaire were weighed more heavily in conclusions drawn by this report than were the earlier questionnaires. This final instrument contained an identical section on attitudes in order that attitudinal changes might be measured. The remaining sections were devoted to teacher assessment of the conceptual prototype units and their usefulness in the classroom.

Other information concerning the project was gathered by taping the presentations at a summative conference held in Raleigh April 29, 1970. At this meeting one representative from each participating school was invited to share findings (and products) with the state staff, with other participants, and with representatives from administrative units who were not directly involved in the project.

Schools (and Grades) Participating in
the Primary Social Studies Pilot Project*

Unit	School	Grades*
Bertie County	C. G. White Elementary Powellsville, N. C.	1,2,3
Caldwell County	Valmead Elementary Lenoir, N. C.	1,2
Guilford County	Monticello Elementary RFD 1, Brown Summit, N. C.	1,2,3
Moore County	Southern Pines Elementary Southern Pines, N. C.	1,2,3
Perquimans County	Hertford Elementary Hertford, N. C.	1,2,3
Raleigh City	Barbee Elementary Raleigh, N. C.	1,2,3
Tarboro City	North Tarboro Elementary Tarboro, N. C.	1,2,3
Watauga County	Parkway Elementary RFD 1, Boone, N. C.	2,3
Wilkes County	Mountain View Elementary Hays, N. C.	1,2,3
Winston-Salem/Forsyth	Fairview Elementary Winston-Salem, N. C.	1,2,3

*Some of these schools have nongraded organizations. The grades refer to the materials used.

Findings

It was assumed that the selection procedures yielded a representative sample of North Carolina primary schools with respect to social studies instruction. Questionnaire responses to items dealing with program background might be summarized as: "satisfactory but not outstanding." Initial status is summarized in Table I. This sample of schools, however, may have been above average in their receptiveness to change (nine of the ten schools had been operating CSIP programs at the primary level). Sixty-eight percent of the conference respondents reported changing their primary curriculum within the past three years.

The teachers were adequately prepared by current standards. Seventy-seven percent of the teachers held the bachelor's degree with the remaining twenty-three percent having achieved a masters. Practically all of the respondents reported some college training in history, geography and sociology. Twenty-seven reported courses in economics during their college careers.

Most of the schools were working toward some type of nongraded organization. However, only two initially indicated that such organization might present a problem when dealing with the (graded) conceptual prototype units. One of the schools solved this condition by restructuring the materials to fit the organization. Another school reverted to a graded organization for social studies only.

The evaluation of the conference training and suggested materials -- which were considered highly desirable for project success -- was not limited to persons who would actually be using the materials. Data for the evaluation of the conference training were obtained by means of a questionnaire which was administered to <u>all</u> persons in attendance at the respective conferences. The responses to items concerning the training were generally positive. Upon completing the work sessions, eighty-eight percent felt confident about their understanding of the conceptual approach. Seventy-two percent felt prepared to communicate the essentials of this approach to others. Another sixty-two percent felt, at this point, that they would be able to design their own units within this framework. Other responses concerning materials are shown in Table II.

When queried concerning the type of training, forty of forty-five respondents would have preferred less lecture and more work with the materials. Likewise eighteen of nineteen indicated a desire for more practical suggestions and less theory. The Wilkesboro participants, limited to a one day session, still believed that training time was sufficient. Eighty percent of the Wilkesboro participants as compared to eighty-three percent of the total group thought that the conference was long enough to adequately introduce the ideas presented. Training evaluation responses are contained in Table IV.

Findings (continued)

The attitudes of the teachers did not change significantly before and after the project. Table III indicates only that "pre" attitudes towards social studies and toward change itself were generally high on an unstandardized instrument and that there were, on the average, more positive changes than negative changes.

The combined evidence indicates that the workshop-conferences satisfactorily accomplished the desired results. Even when allowing for a certain amount of Halo effect - selecting a group for special attention - the face-to-face contact seems effective in stimulating changes. The tardy realization of a real need for some type of cost effectiveness study here detracts considerably from these findings. Nevertheless, one might speculate that the mere fact of face-to-face contact with practitioners will probably equal in importance the inclusiveness of the training. In the results from the project, effects due to dissemination techniques were inseparable from evaluation effects because teachers were requested in advance to report all findings to the state department consultants with whom they worked. The writer perceives a real need for comparative studies of various dissemination techniques.

Even when the limitations of the study are examined, it can be concluded that the preparation and training portion of the conceptual social studies accomplished the goals of the project plan.

Table I

Initial Status of Social Studies in the Ten Sample Schools

Social Studies as a Percent of School Time	Number of Responses	
	Preparation Time	Teaching Time
0 - 4%	17	15
5 - 14%	13	13
15 - 29%	9	12
30% or more	11	10
	50	50

	Percent Responding	
	Yes	No
Social studies grade included on report card	52%	48%
Social studies textbooks available	37%	63%
Supplementary social studies materials available	99%	1%
Audiovisual materials which can be used for social studies	97%	3%

Table II

Participants' Evaluations of Materials

Supplementary materials characterized as:

Unsatisfactory	7%
Barely adequate	7%
Adequate	52%
Excellent	34%

Most favorable aspects of conceptual prototype materials:

Emphasis on concepts rather than facts	60%*
Emphasis on student learning rather than content	34%
The shift away from a single textbook	35%
Flexibility for the teacher to design her own lessons	41%

Possible handicaps to successful use of the prototype materials:

Lack of planning and lead time	54%*
Insufficient teacher training	19%
Excessive amount of teacher preparation required	18%

Evaluation of prototype units:

Clear connections between understanding and learning activities	82%
Too many understandings	15%
Reference to too many (supplementary) materials	3%

Supplementary materials might be more useful than the conceptual prototype units:

Yes	32%
No	32%
Maybe	36%

*Percentages will not total 100 since more than one response was allowed.

Table III

Attitude Scale
(Mean Scores)

	Pretest (N=80)	Posttest (N=55)	Difference
Social Studies*	51.1	52.2	+ 1.1
Change**	28.5	29.0	+ 0.5
Total Attitude	79.5	81.2	+ 1.7

*maximum possible positive score = 70
median score = 42

**maximum possible positive score = 40
median score = 24

Table IV

Conference Training Evaluation

	Yes	No	Maybe
Will you be able to successfully teach the units?	82%	0%	18%

Do you better understand the conceptual approach as a result of this training?

definitely - 60%
to a great extent - 28%
to a limited extent - 12%

	Yes	No	Maybe
Would you be able to explain the conceptual approach to other teachers?	72%	1%	27%
Can you now develop your own conceptual units?	62%	1%	37%

Could written instructions be substituted for conference training?

Yes 17%
No 68%
Under favorable conditions 15%

Did the State Department personnel have an adequate grasp of what they were attempting to accomplish (by the training)?

Yes 100%
No 0%

Project Evaluation

The success of the conceptual social studies project was borne out by responses to the final questionnaires. Eighty-seven percent of the people actually using the units would recommend their use in the 1970-71 school year. Eighty-eight percent felt that their students had successful experiences under this program. These results were obtained in spite of the difficulties of introducing new materials during the school year and with little advance notice.

The major hypothesis, that the conceptual approach can be used effectively, was strongly supported by the majority of teachers selecting options such as those presented in Table VII. That teacher training gains resulted from the project is indicated by twenty-nine percent of the teachers attributing their confidence in their ability to design similar units to being involved with the project. Many teachers expressed surprise at the amount and quality of supplementary material that could be obtained with a little effort. Ninety-four percent reported that they were able to obtain satisfactory supplementary materials.[1] Difficulties were reported concerning the logistics of materials such as film strips and movies. Substitution of materials apparently was relatively extensive.

Teachers readily accepted the responsibility of modifying the materials to fit specific needs. Items describing actual use of the units are summarized in Table V. All respondents indicated either major or minor modifications. The lack of descriptive information concerning these changes, however, may indicate that much change may have been limited to materials substitution.

Information obtained from the on-site visits tended to support the generally positive questionnaire responses. In all schools enthusiasm for the project was high and, in most schools, teacher preparation was more than adequate. All classes demonstrated an abundance of products, e.g., bulletin boards, models, maps, displays, drawings, etc. In some instances it was difficult to distinguish between student "work" and teacher "work." State Department of Public Instruction observers needed more time and more visits in order to better sample student knowledge. Those students who were interviewed were able to satisfactorily answer questions posed by their visitors.

No examples of behaviorly-based objectives were observed during the visits. A few true inquiry techniques were demonstrated. The instance of 3rd graders learning the economics of occupations through interview techniques was an inquiry technique worthy of emulation.

A diversity of approaches to conceptual learning became apparent as visits were made. One school accomplished a revision and combination

[1] Some materials were supplied to a few schools by the State Department of Public Instruction.

Project Evaluation (continued)

of all units. Another made extensive use of the (kindergarten) materials which provided for development of self concept. One school developed an inquiry approach by means of student-produced slide-tape interviews. Yet another school developed considerable expertise in evaluating and adapting all types of free supplementary materials. Many schools found that use of community resource people was beneficial.

Conversations during visits indicated that most teachers were comfortable with an approach in which the ultimate responsibility for planning was placed upon the teacher or the teaching team. Some teachers, however, did indicate that they desired a basal textbook -- "just for guidance."

Comments obtained from the summative conference provided the most positive portion of this evaluation. One representative from each participating school was invited to the conference. Materials brought to this conference ranged from slides of classroom activities to evaluation reports of a school's experiences with the projects. Some participants reported that planning sessions in which teachers of different grade levels worked together were most useful. A majority reported using community resources and resource people. Many were unable to take suggested field trips due to logistic problems and administrative policy. It was brought out at this meeting that the conceptual approach was amenable to teaching map skills and location concepts.

Some participants reported that their schools went beyond the (horizontal) scope of the materials. They expanded the study of the family to include families around the world. Other schools reported considerable expansion of the money and banking section. At the same time, other participants cautioned that overemphasis on a single portion of a year's program tends to lead to neglect of equally important concepts.[2]

Other aspects of the project discussed at this meeting were: ease of correlation with other subjects, modification of the prototype units, and the advantage of reproducing suggested materials into the printed units. The two non-participant observers who were asked to react to the project on the basis of the presentations at the summative conference were positively impressed.

[2]The <u>average</u> teaching time across the sample was approximately eight weeks with a class time of 45 minutes four days per week.

Table V

Actual Use of Prototype Units

How much preparation time was required for each daily lesson?

15-30 minutes 51%
30-45 minutes 40%
more than 45 minutes 9%

How much did you change the materials as you taught the units?

No changes 0%
Small changes 70%
Major changes 30%

Would you have taught these units differently if you had had more planning time:

Yes 42%
No 23%
Don't Know 35%

To what extent were supplementary audiovisual materials helpful in teaching these units:

Great help 77%
Some help 10%
Little help 13%

All supplementary materials available to support your teaching of these units could be described as:

Less than satisfactory 7%
Barely adequate 24%
Adequate 65%
Excellent 4%

Do you believe that, in some cases, the supplementary materials might be more useful than the prototype units?

Yes 24%
No 26%
Maybe 50%

Table VI

Evaluation of the Conceptual Social Studies Experience

How would you describe your school's social studies program before/after involvement with this project?

	Before	After
Strong program in social studies	16%	44%
Satisfactory program in social studies	47%	42%
Needed improvement in social studies	35%	14%
Weak program in social studies	2%	

Could you have taught the conceptual social studies without the training sessions?

Yes 55%
No 37%
Don't Know 8%

Would your school have used these materials if they had been mailed with instructions?

Yes 33%
No 23%
Maybe 44%

Were reactions of teachers from other schools favorable toward the conceptual social studies project?

Yes 84%
No 3%
Don't Know 13%

How did you gain your best understanding of the conceptual approach?

From the conference-workshop 29%
From actually teaching the Units 57%
From reading or other preparation for teaching 14%

Table VI (continued)

Do you feel your students had a successful experience with these materials?

Yes	88%
No	4%
Undecided	8%

Do you believe that you could now develop a unit of work similar to the social studies materials?

Yes	70%
No	2%
Maybe	28%

If you were responsible for making the decision, would your school use the conceptual prototype units in social studies next year?

Yes	87%
No	0%
Maybe	13%

Will your school use these materials next year?

Yes	63%
No	0%
Don't Know	37%

Table VII

Responses to Prepared Statements
Describing Prototype Units and Teaching Materials
(N=54)*

Number of Responses	Descriptive Statement
2	Too many "understandings"
35	Adequate number of "understandings"
11	Too few "understandings"
4	Reference to too many materials
40	Adequate referencing to materials
1	Too many references to the same material
0	"Teaching strategies" too detailed
39	"Teaching strategies" adequate
10	"Teaching strategies" too general
5	The materials lacked a clearcut structure
43	The materials clearly emphasized relevant concepts
3	Too much teacher preparation was required
46	The teacher was allowed the flexibility to plan her own lessons
38	There was a need for more planning time and lead time
10	There was plenty of time to prepare for teaching these units
43	Experiences provided by these materials were meaningful to students
4	Experiences provided by these materials failed to "reach" the majority of the students
5	This approach was not realistic enough for the average classroom
38	Teaching these materials presented no particular problem
31	Materials presented opportunities for team teaching
21	Emphasis was on individual student learning rather than on content
42	Materials presented opportunities for coordination with other subjects
32	Emphasis was on concepts rather than facts

*More than one response was allowed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The combination of evidence gathered during the Conceptual Social Studies Project led to the conclusion that the prototype units as issued are suited for grades 1-3 in North Carolina schools. Suitability of the kindergarten unit was also demonstrated, although with less evidence. Teachers demonstrated a range of sophistication in adhering to a conceptual approach. All, however, seemed reasonably secure with conceptually oriented materials by the end of the project.

Although none of these findings are generalizable to higher grade level, experiences with this sample of teachers indicated that there is currently more conceptual learning at the primary level than advocates of change would have us believe. Perhaps the problem facing those who would improve the curriculum for the primary school is more one of translating current ideas and theory into practical materials than in promoting theory and ideas.

Enough feedback was obtained by this project to support rewriting the units. The diversity of approaches observed, however, indicates that benefits to the practicing teacher might not be worth the time and expense. Almost as many benefits might accrue from expanding the list of substitute and substitutable materials to include all those found to be useful. Serious attention should be paid to designing materials amenable to a nongraded approach. Our sample of teachers had some difficulties in reconciling what they perceived as two approaches. If the behavioral objective approach is deemed necessary, the evidence indicates that such modification should be accomplished under directions of consultants trained in writing behavioral objectives.

As is too often typical, the project raised new questions while providing answers to others. In this case, the dissemination process required more consideration. There is no doubt that the face-to-face dissemination used was effective. Involving principals and supervisors proved most beneficial. Given this project design, it was not possible to isolate effects due to dissemination techniques. Since much of the evaluation hinged upon teacher responses, all participants received full information about the project including the plan for on-site visits and use of the questionnaire data. This disclosure undoubtedly contributed positively to project results. Now that the materials have been adjudged suitable, it would seem most desirable to implement a study of dissemination techniques. At the same time, costs of various techniques, (television, single trip contacts, conferences with out follow up, etc.) should be considered. It might prove worthwhile to consider student outcomes in more depth.

Finally, promoters of new approaches for North Carolina schools should not overlook the cadre of local school personnel who have been trained by this project and might be willing to function as disseminators in future projects. Some of these are currently producing their own units similar to the prototypes.